

Jordanian Women Capitalize on Small Loans

When Arije Al-Amad began working with Microfund for Women (MFW), she wanted to do more than just give loans. She wanted to help women achieve their dreams. Studies show that almost two-thirds of businesses in Jordan are run by women. But lack of collateral or credit history often prevents them from obtaining loans from commercial banks, making business start up or expansion difficult.

"I joined the microfinance sector believing in the great potential of this industry and its positive impacts on the lives of many Jordanian women," says Arije. She dedicated herself to strengthening MFW's ability to help women by refining lending policies, improving training, and developing new products.

In 1998, USAID began working closely with Arije and MFW as part of a larger effort to establish a vibrant, sustainable microfinance industry in Jordan. Through USAID grants, Arije with other MFW staff developed innovative new products such as the 'Back to School' loan for women who trade in such essential items as stationary and sewing supplies. USAID also helped MFW achieve financial independence through the creation of the Wholesale Funding Facility, a source of cash collateral that MFW and other institutions can use to obtain loans from commercial banks.



Photo: Sharon Farmer

(L-R) Mishal Husain, journalist, stands with Arije Al-Amad, winner of the Vital Voices Global Partnership award in 2003.

USAID enlists specialists to provide technical assistance and training in developing business plans, formulating operational strategies, and integrating an efficient management information system. Other USAID-supported initiatives, such as the development of a regional training program, helped MFW cooperate with other institutions to share best practices and improve their ability to serve clients.

By 2004, Arije and MFW had disbursed 86,000 loans to 33,000 women throughout Jordan. MFW's extraordinary success as an effective and financially viable lending institution has helped promote sustainable microfinance practices throughout Jordan and beyond. USAID's efforts to improve Jordan's sustainable microfinance industry have paid off. The industry now has better trained staff, using best practice in microfinance, and acts as a role model for others in the microfinance industry in Jordan.

"I am proud to have witnessed an increasing number of female borrowers rushing down the hallway of success and achievement. They are living examples of the true spirit of entrepreneurship."

- Arije Al-Amad, Microfund for Women

Arije now manages a team of forty-five field workers who serve more than 8,000 clients. Her pioneering work has helped thousands of poor women start successful small agricultural businesses and lift their families out of poverty. For her dedication to improving the lives of women, Arije was one of three women selected from around the world in 2003 as a 'Voice of Hope in a Time of Global Challenge' by the U.S.-based organization Vital Voices Global Partnership.



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